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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [AL](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: CONVICTION OF ANSAR AL-MEHDI CELL MEMBERS

Classified By: Craig Karp for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (SBU) In a month long trial, 50 out of 51 defendants in the sensational Answar al-Mehdi terror cell case were convicted on January 4 in Morocco's terrorism court in Sale and sentenced to prison terms ranging from two to 25 years. The alleged mastermind Hassan al-Khattab and the group's second in command Yassine El-Ouardini received 25 and 20 year sentences, respectively. Forty-eight others received sentences of two to 15 years, according to press reports. The trial, which was open to the public, had drawn much attention in Morocco over the last year because of the group's malicious plans and composition. The network, which evolved primarily out of Casablanca but also included recruits from several cities across Morocco had plans to attack the U.S. Embassy in Rabat and tourist sites, and to kidnap several Moroccan Ministers. It was composed of many middle class status individuals, several uniformed members of the Moroccan Royal Armed Forces and Gendarmerie, and four women, including two wives of Royal Moroccan Airlines (RAM) pilots.

2. (C) In an Embassy follow-up interview with the chief prosecutor in the case, Rabat Court of Appeals Counterterrorism Chief Yahya El-Hassan described Hassan al-Khattab as highly intelligent and dangerous. Although the group has no known linkages to the Algeria-based group al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb, El-Hassan said that al-Khattab had hoped to mimic the terrorist exploits of the group by creating space in Morocco for training and religious radicalization in addition to executing attacks against high profile targets. El-Hassan said that the group had been primarily motivated by its desire to overthrow the Moroccan Government and replace it with an Islamic one. However, the group, more broadly, considered all Moroccans that supported the government to be infidels and therefore, like Westerners, were considered to be viable operational targets. El-Hassan added that the two RAM pilots, husbands of two of the women convicted in the case, were completely unaware of their wives' activities with Ansar al-Mehdi. Per normal Moroccan judicial procedures, the vast majority, if not all, of the convicted individuals will likely exercise their right to appeal the court's decision. These appeals are expected to be heard in February 2008.

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